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Canadian/American Studies Program Launched

A special grant from the New York State Legislature has helped to launch a new initiative at the University at Buffalo Law School, enabling the school to take its first steps toward establishing a Canada-United States Legal Studies Centre.

The impetus behind the exploratory venture into a new dimension of international and comparative legal studies can be traced to the growing awareness in New York of the Buffalo region’s key location as a crossroads linking the United States and Canada. The city’s close proximity to the border has become increasingly significant as a result of the newly enacted Free Trade Agreement, which eased trade restrictions.

Professor Thomas E. Headrick is supervising the initial efforts that may eventually lead to a full program of Canada-United States legal studies. The pilot program is being funded by a $40,000 state legislative grant, according to Dean David B. Filvaroff. The grant was sponsored by State Sen. John B. Sheffer II of Amherst and Assemblyman William B. Hoyt of Buffalo.

Headrick, Professor Virginia A. Leary and Professor Robert S. Berger worked on formulating the Canada-United States Legal Studies Centre proposal. Headrick, who is serving as interim director of the Centre initiative, said the first-year funding already has brought results. On Friday, March 2, 1990, UB Law School will host an international conference on controversial government subsidy issues that complicate Canadian-United States trade relations. In addition, the Centre will run a semester-long workshop on Canadian law targeted for students and faculty at the Law School this spring.

Headrick said these “are just the first steps.” Also under consideration is the possibility of cooperative studies involving UB Law School, the University of Toronto, and Osgoode Hall at York University in Toronto. He noted that the Free Trade Agreement has added to the growing attraction of Canadian markets for U.S. businesses while there has also been a strong Canadian interest in learning more about U.S. business affairs. The Canadian Charter of Rights and developments in health policy, labor law and financial deregulation have also attracted wide U.S. interest.

“These several currents of interest bring fresh new implications to legal practice and the study of law on both sides of the border and are not limited to trade issues,” he said.

UB Law School currently offers three courses on a regular basis that focus on Canadian legal issues. The Canada-United States Legal Studies Centre initiative could expand this into a specialty in Canadian law as part of the J.D. program, Headrick said.

There are other goals also possible, including stimulating legal research into Canada-United States legal issues, more exchanges with other Canadian law schools and expanding library resources for the study of Canadian-American legal problems. All of these, Headrick said, seem to follow naturally from the growing interest among American law firms in beginning to explore the prospects for practice in Canada or for serving corporate clients with Canadian expansion plans.

The March conference, to be held on campus, will look at non-tariff barriers to trade and the sensitive issue of government subsidies to industries that compete on an international level.

“Each country has a tendency to believe that the other unfairly subsidizes its domestic companies and thus gives them an unfair trade advantage.” Headrick said. Legal experts from both Canada and the U.S. will report on those competitive perceptions at the UB Law School conference.

The spring 1990 workshop, he said, will bring together UB Law faculty and faculty from law schools across Canada to explore possible ways for developing curricula and cross-training of lawyers in Canadian and American law.

Headrick emphasized that “these are just first steps, realistic first steps.” The $40,000 legislative grant will cover just the first year start-up costs. “But we are looking beyond one year,” Headrick said. As many as a dozen UB Law faculty have already expressed an interest in the centre, he pointed out.

Headrick has appointed Laura Mangan to the position of administrative director of the new centre. A graduate of the University of Sussex, in England, Mangan spent seven years in Johannesburg, South Africa, as an administrator for the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand before coming to Buffalo. Mangan is also handling the administration for the new Human Rights Center in the Law School.